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NEA/ELA
NSC FOR MARCLONE
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OFM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2016
TAGS: [EFIN](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SARG COMPLAINT RE PERSONAL BANKING PROBLEMS IN
WASHINGTON

Classified By: CDA Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.5 b/d

¶1. (C) On the margins of a late August meeting with the director of protocol at the MFA, another MFA official, Bassam Sabbagh, raised with the Charge a complaint from the Syrian Embassy in Washington that it was being cut off from necessary banking services in the U.S. Sabbagh had no specifics on what accounts, in which banks, were affected, but suggested the SARG could take reciprocal action against the U.S. mission in Damascus.

¶2. (C) Sabbagh promised to provide more information to allow the embassy to follow up. Sabbagh did not, however, provide any further information, but the embassy in Washington did provide specifics to the desk on issues with personal accounts of Syrian embassy officials in Washington.

¶3. (C) On September 7, Charge drew on information provided by NEA, EB, and L and informed Sabbagh that the official accounts of both the Syrian Embassy in Washington and the UN mission in New York were operating unimpeded. Charge further commented that the only banking disruptions we were able to identify had to do with the personal accounts of seven staff members at the Syrian Embassy in Washington. Charge pointed out to Sabbagh that it is incumbent on the individuals involved to obtain their own private banking services and the USG has no obligation to intervene on their behalf. Charge asserted that there was no basis for SARG reciprocal action against the U.S. Embassy in Damascus.

¶4. (C) Sabbagh made no substantive reply and seemed to understand the difference between personal and private accounts. He made no reference to his earlier suggestion that the SARG had a basis for reciprocal action against our official accounts in Syria.

¶5. (C) Comment. We have taken seriously the SARG's threat as it has an established track record of responding to any slight, real or imagined, suffered by the Syrian embassy in the U.S. by trying to act against our mission in Damascus. We hope this will be the last we hear of this issue. But given this is Syria, and the fact that SARG doesn't view facts as necessary to support punitive action, we are documenting this latest diplomatic focus on Embassy operations.

CORBIN